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Cornfields and Campgrounds

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IOWA is justifiably proud of the fact that in some respects she is the most favored among the states. The quality of her agricultural soils, for example, is unequalled. In respect, however, to outdoor recreation facilities such as forested camp- and picnic-grounds, she is not to be especially envied.

A striking commentary on this situation is to be found on the road from Des Moines to Ames, in the form of a new and brightly painted sign-board which reads about as follows:

RELAX IN WISCONSIN

WHERE FRIENDS AND NATURE MEET

ONE DAY'S DRIVE FROM HERE

INFORMATION SENT ON REQUEST

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

To an Iowan, that sign must suggest a comparison of the beauty of Wisconsin's scenery with that of Iowa; a comparison by which Iowa cannot but suffer.

THIS observation is not intended to be critical of Wisconsin's policy. But there is another implication, evidenced by the very erection of that sign-board and others like it. It is the implication that Iowa has so little pride in the beauty of her own landscape that she permits the agents of another state to come here and further mar that landscape.

It is cause for shame that we have not yet learned to choose between the unspeakable ugliness of a roadside cluttered with signs of every conceivable size, shape, color, and general unsightliness on the one hand, and the simple but eloquent beauty of an unmarred rural scene on the other.

One does not expect, of course, that this single cry will be

heard very far, nor that it will spell the death of Iowa's billboards. But even if it could, the job would only then be started. For after all, what Iowa should want, if she has any pride, or any abiding interest in her citizens, is not to keep her people in ignorance of the attractions of other states. Rather, she *should* want to provide, right here at home, the facilities that her people need.

It is to be understood that Iowa is and will always remain essentially an agricultural state. In the light of present knowledge, it is safe to predict that corn will always be the major crop. But to suggest that every available acre be planted to corn, or put into agricultural production of any sort, is to recall the fable of the foolish Midas. It is well to remember the lesson of that fable, lest the stress of economic depression serve to focus attention on utilitarian values, until inspirational and other intangible values are all but forgotten. The highest use is not necessarily the one which pays the greatest monetary return.

THERE is no denying the fact that present systems of land use have mostly "just happened." In a young country, that was inevitable. It was just as inevitable that mistakes would be made, that some lands which ought never to be cleared would be brought under the plow, and that after a period of cropping, these lands would revert to some form of less intensive use. The depression brought this country to a realization that the wild lands were gone, and that it no longer was possible to move west to new opportunities when the old home farm was cropped out.

Land-use-planning was devised to correct some of the earlier mistakes in land use policy, and planning boards are now functioning throughout most of the country, including Iowa. They are doing a splendid job. But their task is so vast and so complex that considerable time must elapse before completed plans can be put into operation.

Meanwhile, with the federal government straining every resource to bring about reduced production of agricultural commodities, and to encourage the growing of soil-conserving crops, Iowa suffers for need of recreational facilities.

IOWA needs children's playgrounds. Cities, towns, counties, and local rural communities need special playground areas, not necessarily large, but well distributed, so that they will be readily accessible to all juveniles, and well equipped with



Our roadsides—"a cause for shame."

swings, wading pools and other ordinary playground equipment. In parts of the state that are so level that no natural coasting hills are readily available, artificial coasting hills should be built. The saving in lives alone would more than justify this expense to protect children from the hazards of modern street and highway traffic.

With all due respect to the city parks of Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, and other cities in the state, it should be evident that city, town, and community parks are all too few, too small, and too poorly financed. Such areas have an important function and do not conflict with any of the other recreational areas mentioned here. They are accessible for outings and picnics for families who do not have the time nor the means to travel to more distant places. Playground equipment may be a necessary part of their accommodations, but city parks cannot, and should never attempt to supplant the playground entirely.

REQUIREMENTS of the tourist need to be considered, and this involves first, a general cleanup and beautification of the roadsides. Tourist traffic and tourist business can be attracted by the right kind of lures. Many tourists carry camping-out equipment with them. If Iowa wishes to play the host to them, she must provide roadside stopping places that are commodious and pleasant.

State parks, of which there are so many fine examples in Iowa now, are needed to care for citizens who can afford to get away for a day or for a week-end. Trees, flowers, camping accommodations, and fish-stocked streams and lakes enhance the drawing power of state parks, and add to their usefulness.

Finally, an adequate state-wide program of recreation must look to the needs of the summer vacationer, the summer-home owner and the resort owner. Natural wooded lands with lakes, streams, and hills or bluffs, are requisite for this kind of use.



A public camping ground offers relief from the heat of crowded cities.

Admittedly, Iowa's opportunities in this particular direction are more limited than those of some other states. The very wealthy, who can afford a summer home in the Northern Rockies, or in any of the exclusive summer resort areas of the nation, will not be attracted in large numbers. But there is good reason to believe that many of moderate means who are now forced to suffer the heat in crowded cities, would eagerly welcome an opportunity to move to such areas within the state.

WHAT is needed, then, is a state-wide planned expansion of recreational facilities and recreational activities. In this expanded program, careful consideration should be given to the correlation of all phases of recreation within the state. Furthermore, each new development should be planned with an eye on the situation in neighboring states, if not in the nation as a whole.

While this is not a proposal to cure our economic ills entirely, it is pertinent to mention some of the benefits, both economic and social, that may be expected to accrue from such a far-seeing program.

The intangible, but none-the-less real, inspirational benefits, the development of pride in the state and her resources, the educational value of supervised play, the cultural significance of frequent and close contact with nature, the stimulus to health and morale, are too obvious to warrant more than passing mention.

THE earliest concept of a forest was that of a royal pleasure and hunting ground. The passage of time has changed this conception, and it is now generally agreed that forests can serve more than a single purpose. Some superlative forest areas are managed for their recreational values alone and some are managed for wood production alone, but the idea that these uses are incompatible on the same area, is outmoded. Indeed, a single forest area may simultaneously be managed for soil conservation, for watershed protection, and for wild life production, as well as for wood and recreation.

The slogan, "See America First," applies as well to Iowa as to America, and for the same reason. Providing at home for the recreational needs of its citizens, keeps money within the state that would otherwise flow outside.

Not only that, but recreation brings in surprising amounts of money from outside sources. Hotels, cabin camps, railroads, bus lines, grocers, butchers, garages and sporting goods stores enjoy direct increases in their business, with the result that all business in the affected area is stimulated. Given the opportunity, tourists buy many supplies direct from farmers, thus opening new cash markets.

NUMEROUS studies of revenue from tourist trade have shown the importance of this often maligned institution. The Wisconsin Committee on Land Use and Forestry, in a report¹ published in 1932, concluded, "Wisconsin sells her recreational facilities for \$70,000,000 a year with out depleting these resources. In addition, these tourists pay almost \$3,000,000 in gasoline taxes." The same report states that Wisconsin's annual out-of-state tourist business in 1927 produced a revenue in excess of \$140,000,000, and was exceeded only by the motor vehicle, the dairy, and the iron and steel industries, in the order named. In 1931, a depression year, the average daily expenditure per tourist was \$1.36. The comparative figure for the period 1923 to 1929, when business was much better, was \$2.66.

Increased business such as tourists produce, gives stability to communities whose former sources of income have been depleted. New jobs are created. The tax base is broadened so that individual burdens are lightened. "Success begets success," and improvement in economic life brings improvement in social and political life. Even if the recreational activities are confined to a limited area of the state, they nevertheless

¹ Committee on Land Use and Forestry—Report, "Forest Land Use in Wisconsin." PP. I-V & 1-156. Bibl. Madison, Wis. 1932.

give impetus to more remote industries, by creating new demands for their products.

ANY radical departure from established policies necessarily requires a long time for accomplishment. Not everything that needs to be done can be foreseen at present, but certain principles may be set down at the beginning and certain general responsibilities may be delegated.

In Iowa, the State Conservation Commission is the logical agency to coordinate and have broad advisory power over every phase of the development, including rural and municipal parks and playgrounds. A central directive agency is necessary to regulate the amount of development, not only of public but of private recreational facilities as well. The Conservation Commission cannot, of course, be expected to finance nor to technically supervise the actual construction of local facilities. Its technical job lies in the extension of the existing state park system, in the establishment of state forests and the very important work of formulating basic conservation policies. The Commission is the only agency to which we can look for authoritative leadership in the battle of the bill-boards, in controlling the pollution of intra-state waters, and in stocking streams and upland areas with fish and game species. State parks are being extended and definite plans have been made to acquire wild lands for state forests. The improvement of these lands to the point where they will yield the maximum returns is already assured.

IT MUST not be forgotten that the recreation problem is only a part of the land use problem, which also involves the protection of the watersheds of navigable streams and soil conservation. In these aspects, as well as in recreation, the federal government must share responsibility with the state. Preliminary work looking toward the purchase of national forest areas in southeastern Iowa has been under way for some time. The mutual benefits to be expected from bringing the United States Forest Service actively into the solution of the state's land problems cannot be doubted. It is to be hoped that sufficient funds will soon be forthcoming to permit the consummation of these purchases.

In the light of the above suggestions, it is evident that local, state, and national administrative officials must work together to accomplish the desired results.

But the work of these officials in specific instances should

be guided by carefully planned research, which transcends partisan political and local selfish issues. The complexity of the problem, extending over more than 56,000 square miles and involving the integration of many varied soil uses, to build a unified plan toward which all may conscientiously strive, calls for the closest cooperation of everyone concerned.

Of paramount importance is a complete inventory of all existing and potential recreation resources, classified according to their respective adaptabilities for different forms of use. Simple as this seems at first glance, a complication will appear as soon as the study is opened. When one area is found to be equally suitable for two or more forms of use, it will be necessary to classify the uses themselves according to some standard of priority.

Nor can this inventory safely be based upon an appraisal of existing needs alone. To be adequate, plans must look forward as far as reasonable predictions will allow. It is safe to assume that continually increasing efficiency of industrial production will, before long, bring the dream of the 30-hour work week to reality. When that time comes and the final readjustments necessitated by the depression are made, our people will have more leisure time. Health-giving, invigorating outdoor recreation promises the most profitable means of utilizing that surplus time. Undoubtedly, there are many other factors of equal importance that are less readily apparent to any but the trained sociologist. His services are needed.

THE economist and the forester have their work laid out in determining, first of all, a satisfactory method of evaluating recreational uses for purposes of comparison with other uses. If, then, on the dollar and cents basis, these experts arrive at a different conclusion than their friend the sociologist, the occasion arises for a delicate weighing of relative values. In the meantime, however, the soil scientist and the agronomist will have been busy learning the chemical and physical characteristics of the soil, and determining on that basis, whether the soil itself, irrespective of scenery and surroundings, is best adapted for grass, legumes, and cereals, or is submarginal for agricultural use. They will determine the extent of the erosion of rich top-soil, and, with the help of the agricultural and hydraulic engineers and the forester, decide upon the most practicable means for preventing further losses and restoring some of the losses that have already occurred.

The economist will compile statistical tables of tax-delin-

quency. With the sociologist, he will prepare charts and graphs showing trends of population, of standards of living, and of agricultural production.

The landscape architect and the state highway department together will plan for roadside beautification. New road locations will be selected on the basis of aesthetic as well as engineering criteria.



"Health-giving, invigorating, outdoor recreation promises the most profitable means of utilizing that surplus time."

ZOOLOGISTS, fish and game experts and sanitation engineers, concerned about the possibilities for fish propagation, will suggest the means for disposing of industrial and sewage wastes by some more sensible means than dumping them directly into our streams. The fish and game men will study problems of ecology, of physiology, and of life histories, to the end that better management plans may be adopted.

Any other specialists who can contribute to a more thorough comprehension of whatever elements of the problem their training enables them to understand, should be invited to participate. Land-use planners and federal farm relief officials will surely be consulted.

THE best results from such a far-reaching research program can not be secured without having all parts of the study headed up by a strong central authority. In Iowa, the most logical way to handle the project would seem to be the appointment by the State Conservation Commission of a qualified research worker to serve as a representative of that Commission and to head up the work in the state agricultural experiment station. A competent staff of scientists, long engaged in solving problems of similar nature, is already employed there. There is no lack of interest in the problem, but there is need for one individual who can direct that interest and help to coordinate the findings of all investigators when the project is undertaken.

To summarize briefly, this paper has tried to suggest answers to the following questions:

1. What is the present situation with respect to land use in Iowa?
2. What adjustments in present land-use policies are urgently needed?
3. What good can we expect to derive from a greatly expanded program of forest recreation?
4. How is it proposed to bring about the development of this program?
5. What action should immediately be taken in order to bring to bear on this problem in a common purpose, the united efforts of many individuals with widely divergent views?

Far-reaching social and economic changes are underway. Recreation, almost unknown until a few years ago, promises to become a major human activity wherever its importance is recognized and proper preparations are made. The cornfields are not threatened; they are just being asked to move over a little.